



Cherokee National Forest

2020 Weekly Fall Color Report

Report 3: October 16

Cherokee National Forest covers 656,000 acres in ten east Tennessee counties. It borders the Great Smoky Mountains National Park from the north (Unaka & Watauga Ranger Districts) and from the south (Tellico & Ocoee Ranger Districts). It offers a variety of outdoor recreation

including camping, hiking, picnicking, hunting, boating, fishing, driving for pleasure, mountain biking and more.

Fall is a popular time of year in the Cherokee National Forest (Forest). Each year during fall thousands of people from near and far visit the Forest to witness the blazes of red, gold, yellow, bronze and purple that signal the passing of summer and the coming of winter.

The peak fall foliage-viewing period can vary from area to area depending on several factors. The factors that influence fall leaf color are shorter day lengths, weather (primarily cooler temperatures and less moisture) and changing levels of leaf pigments. The only constant factor from year to year is the shortening day length. As days become shorter and nights grow longer, biochemical processes in the leaf initiate changing leaf color. All the other factors vary annually, making the prediction of fall color peak difficult. <https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/documents/SP529.pdf>

The peak period of fall color in the Cherokee National Forest is typically from mid-late October through early November. The northern Ranger Districts (Watauga & Unaka) usually peak earlier than the southern Ranger Districts (Tellico & Ocoee.)



Depending on conditions color change may occur rapidly and vary from area to area. Currently, colors are scattered throughout the area.

Current Conditions:

North Cherokee National Forest

Unaka & Watauga Ranger Districts: Color is showing throughout the area, especially at higher elevations. Colors usually peak at higher elevations first and move down the mountainsides to the valleys.

South Cherokee National Forest

Ocoee & Tellico Ranger Districts: Yellow and red colors are showing at the higher elevations. Leaves will begin to change color as the days become shorter and the temperatures drop at night. Look for color change at the higher elevations first.



Cherokee National Forest Offices:

Forest Supervisor's Office: 423-476-9700

Ocoee Ranger District: 423-338-3300

Ocoee Whitewater Center: 423-496-0100

Tellico Ranger District: 423-397-8455

Unaka Ranger District: 423-638-4109

Watauga Ranger District: 423-735-1500



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Scenic Routes

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Northeast Tennessee:

TN-107/TN-81 Greenville to Erwin—Unaka Ranger District, Greene, Washington, and Unicoi Counties, TN: From Greenville travel through the Nolichucky River Valley along the base of the Bald Mountains. Then drive through a narrow corridor between cliffs and the Nolichucky River. Scenic views of farmland, rural communities, mountains and the River are to be found along the way. From the scenic town of Erwin you have the option of traveling on **1-26** toward Johnson City or toward Sam's Gap and on to North Carolina.

Newport (US 25/70) to Greenville (TN 107)—Unaka Ranger District, Cocke and Greene Counties, TN: From Newport travel along the French Broad River Valley surrounded by mountains to the historic town of Del Rio. Then take **TN 107** toward Greenville. This drive winds through the Cherokee National Forest and down into Houston Valley to South Greene County. Scenic views of farmland and mountains abound along the way.

TN State Route 143 to Carver's Gap—Watauga Ranger District, Carter County, TN: From US HWY 19E turn onto **TN 143** at the community of Roan Mountain. This scenic route climbs through Roan Mountain State Park and Cherokee National Forest to Carvers Gap where there are numerous long-distance mountain vistas, picnic spots, rhododendrons and spruce-fir forests.

US 321/TN 67 Scenic Drive—Watauga Ranger District, Carter & Johnson Counties: These scenic drives follow the shoreline of Watauga Lake, accessing several national forest recreation areas and providing scenic views of the lake and Cherokee NF land on Iron Mountain. The highways split east of the lake, where both individual routes pass through farmlands, rural communities and scenic mountain views toward Mountain City, TN and Boone, NC.

Southeast Tennessee:

Ocoee Scenic Byway—Ocoee Ranger District, Polk County, TN: The first designated National Forest Scenic Byway in the nation includes 26 miles of US HWY 64 and Forest Road 77. This route winds past Parksville Lake, through the Ocoee River Gorge and past the Ocoee Whitewater Center. Take a side trip up the 7-mile Chilhowee Scenic Spur, Forest Road 77, to Chilhowee Recreation Area. The winding drive up the mountain offers several pull-outs with great views of surrounding mountains and the Tennessee Valley.

Hiwassee River Road—Ocoee Ranger District, Polk County, TN: From US HWY 411, TN State Route 30 follows the Hiwassee State Scenic River to the historic community of Reliance. This road is narrow and winding. Continue south on TN 30 to US HWY 64 where you have the option to travel east toward Ducktown or west toward Cleveland.

Tellico River Road—Tellico Ranger District, Monroe County, TN: Take TN State Route 165 from Tellico Plains to Forest Road 210. The route follows the Tellico River past Bald River Falls, where you can view the magnificent falls. Views along the River are beautiful. This road is narrow and winding.

Cherochala Skyway—Tellico Ranger District, Monroe County, TN: View outstanding mountain scenery from this 43-mile National Scenic Byway -TN State Route 165 from Tellico Plains to Robbinsville, NC (NC 143). The route travels through the beautiful Cherokee and Nantahala National Forests. From Tellico Plains travel along the Tellico River before beginning to climb higher. At higher elevations you can stop at overlooks to take in expansive views of the Tennessee Valley and of mountain peaks!



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Enjoy your visit!

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REMEMBER: The environment in a national forest is much different than in urban areas. Always be prepared for the unexpected. Check weather reports prior to visiting and during your visit. To ensure that your visit to the great outdoors is enjoyable and memorable always put safety first!

Outdoor safety tips visit:

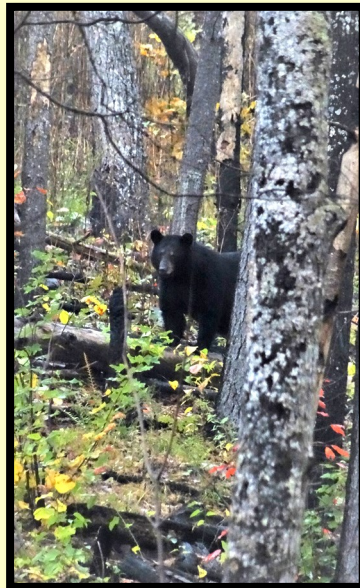
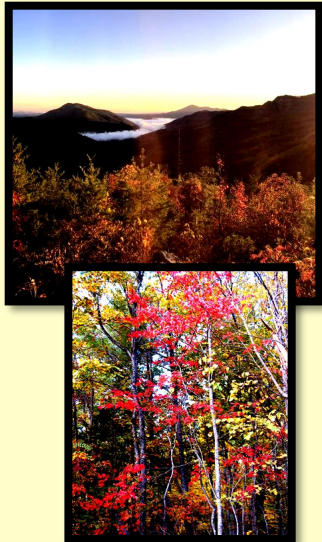
https://www.fs.usda.gov/detailfull/r8/home/?cid=fsbdev3_066386&width=full

National Weather Service information:

<http://forecast.weather.gov/MapClick.php?lat=36.21&lon=-83.3#.VFpnxkZ0x9M>

Learn about the *Changing Color of Leaves*: UT Agricultural Extension Service

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/documents/SP529.pdf>



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